IBrowse 2.3

In the world of web browsing, Amigans often walk a fine line between enjoyment and frustration. We're not all but forced to use Microsoft software like nearly all of the PC and a good chunk of the Mac public are, but we also commonly run into web sites that tell us, either subtly or directly, that we need those Microsoft products to look at their site, even if it's not actually true. The Amiga world has three browsers to call its own, all special in their own right.

Once the "official" browser packaged with Amiga OS 3.5 and 3.9, Aweb, that is Aweb II version 3.4, has since fallen on harder times. Similar to the YAM mailer program, the developer released the Aweb source code, enabling others to continue development. A version has been ported to MorphOS, but not a lot more has been heard yet. Aweb seems perhaps the most stable of the browsers (but not uncrashable in my experience), and has the singular distinction of not requiring the MUI system for its interface, instead using the Class Act / Reaction system incorporated in Amiga OS 3.5 and above. Like all the Amiga browsers, it's very capable, and has a strong share of users.

Once planned to become the official Amiga OS web browser under the name "Mindwalker," Voyager (version 3.3.126) could be described as the most cutting-edge of the browsers, as it has limited support for many things commonly seen in PC browsers, such as plugins for Shockwave Flash, PDF documents, and more. It has also been updated most often, and versions for Amiga 68k and MorphOS are available. It could be described as "bleeding edge" at times, as Voyager was sometimes more prone to crashing than other browsers (the Amiga version, I can't speak for the Morph version), although more recent revisions are much more stable than previous ones. With the Vaporware web site and fairly frequent updates, it is a well-supported browser at least.

The final browser, and the focus of this writeup, is IBrowse. It started out as a rework of one of the very first Amiga Web browsers, "AMosaic," and looks set to become the next official web browser for Amiga OS 4, in a PowerPC native form. For the longest time IBrowse stood at version 2.2, a very capable browser with a nice interface, but occasionally crash-prone, and in desperate need of an update or two, until early this year. We heard tell of Shockwave Flash and other plugins which would be part of the next IBrowse update, so in some ways 2.3 was a little disappointing, in that it had hardly any grand changes or additions. That may have been a good thing though, as it gave the programmer time to update and improve what was already there. As expected, the level of modern HTML and Javascript support has been improved, and many Javascript based features that didn't work properly before on some web sites now work nicely. It's a double-edged sword, as some script-based annoyances, such as pop-up ads IBrowse was too "dumb" to handle before, now appear. Script support still isn't perfect, but it's mostly equal to or better than the other Amiga browsers, although I have run into a few things that IBrowse still won't do that Aweb or Voyager will.

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Another element that has been improved, one I've been a great fan of since version 2, is the means for handling multiple web site views. Most web browsers allow you to open multiple windows, so you can view or flip through multiple web pages. Since version 2, IBrowse does one better by letting you open extra "browsers" within one window, and switching between them by

clicking tabs at the top of the viewing area. With version 2.3, some small additions have been made to enhance this system. It's common to start a web page downloading in one browser, then switch to another to look around while the first finishes up. Now the tab title will change color to indicate that it has finished loading (and you haven't looked at it yet). Also, there is now always an empty spot for an extra tab in the row. I didn't know why at first, but I found it allows you to drag and drop a link from the view area into the empty tab spot, which opens a new browser for the link. It seems you can only use the drag and drop when you already have two or more browsers in a window already, but there are plenty of other methods for doing the same.

Perhaps the greatest improvement to IBrowse 2.3 is to its stability. No web browser is 100 percent bulletproof with all the poor or corrupted web site code seen in this world, but the new version is far more reliable than the last, and all the known bugs that I've observed in version 2.2 have been fixed. Stability seems to be about on-par with Aweb now. Less obvious improvements have also been made to the speed and efficiency of the program. It works well with the AmiSSL package, which offers encryption for secure sites that works faster than the SSL offered thru the Miami TCP stack.

It's still a good idea to have more than one of the Amiga browsers, if not all three, since there always seems to be something one does the other two won't.

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April Calendar

April 14 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:30 pm — University Center, Pedernales Room
W. First St. & S. West St., Arlington

April 14 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 10:00 pm — TGI Fridays
Cooper Street just south of I-20, Arlington

April 17 — Amiga North Dallas Chapter
7:30 pm — Junkins Building, SMU
Dyer and Airline Extension Rd., Dallas

April 26 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

IBrowse still persists as a personal favorite of mine, due to its great handling of multiple pages, along with the general look and feel of the interface. The new 2.3 version has only strengthened those points. It may not be the most fully-featured browser, but it is easy to use, fast, well-featured, and reliable enough to be your only browser, as long as you aren't expecting to go to sites loaded with Shockwave, Java, or Internet-Explorer-exclusive crap. IBrowse 2.3 is a free update to owners of version 2.2. Visit www.iospirit.de for the update, or a free demo version if you don't own the old version. You can also buy the key to turn the demo into the full program. I recommend it.

...review by Eric Schwartz
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